Editor,—The investigations of Barrie M Margetts and Alan A Jackson into the eating habits of smokers cast new light on the problem of passive smoking and the toxicity of environmental tobacco smoke.[1] More than 50 epidemiological studies have investigated the risk of lung cancer, heart disease, and other diseases in relation to exposure to environmental tobacco smoke among adults who have never smoked. Positive correlations were found in some but not all of these studies.[2] Increased risks among non-smokers exposed to environmental tobacco smoke seem unlikely because lung cell doses in these people are probably only 1/10 000 to 1/100 000 of those in average mainstream smokers.[3]

The possibility that confounding factors that were not previously controlled for caused the increased risks cannot be ruled out. One important confounding factor—namely, diet—has been established by the work of Margetts and Jackson.[1] Non-smokers living with smokers are not only exposed to environmental tobacco smoke but may share the less healthy dietary practices of their spouses; thus diet may explain their increased risks of lung cancer, coronary heart disease, or other diseases.

OTTRUBELT

Institut für Toxikologie der Medizinischen Universität zu Lübeck, D-23538 Lübeck, Germany

1 Margetts BM, Jackson AA. Interactions between people's diet and their smoking habits: the dietary and nutritional survey of British adults. *BMJ* 1993;307:1381–4. (27 November.)
2 Lee PN. *Environmental tobacco smoke and mortality*. Basle: Karger, 1993.
3 Gori GB, Mantel N. Mainstream and environmental tobacco smoke. *Regul Toxicol Pharmacol* 1991;14:155–165.